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SASKATCHEWAN.  
THE LANGUAGE QUESTION IN  
SASKATCHEWAN.



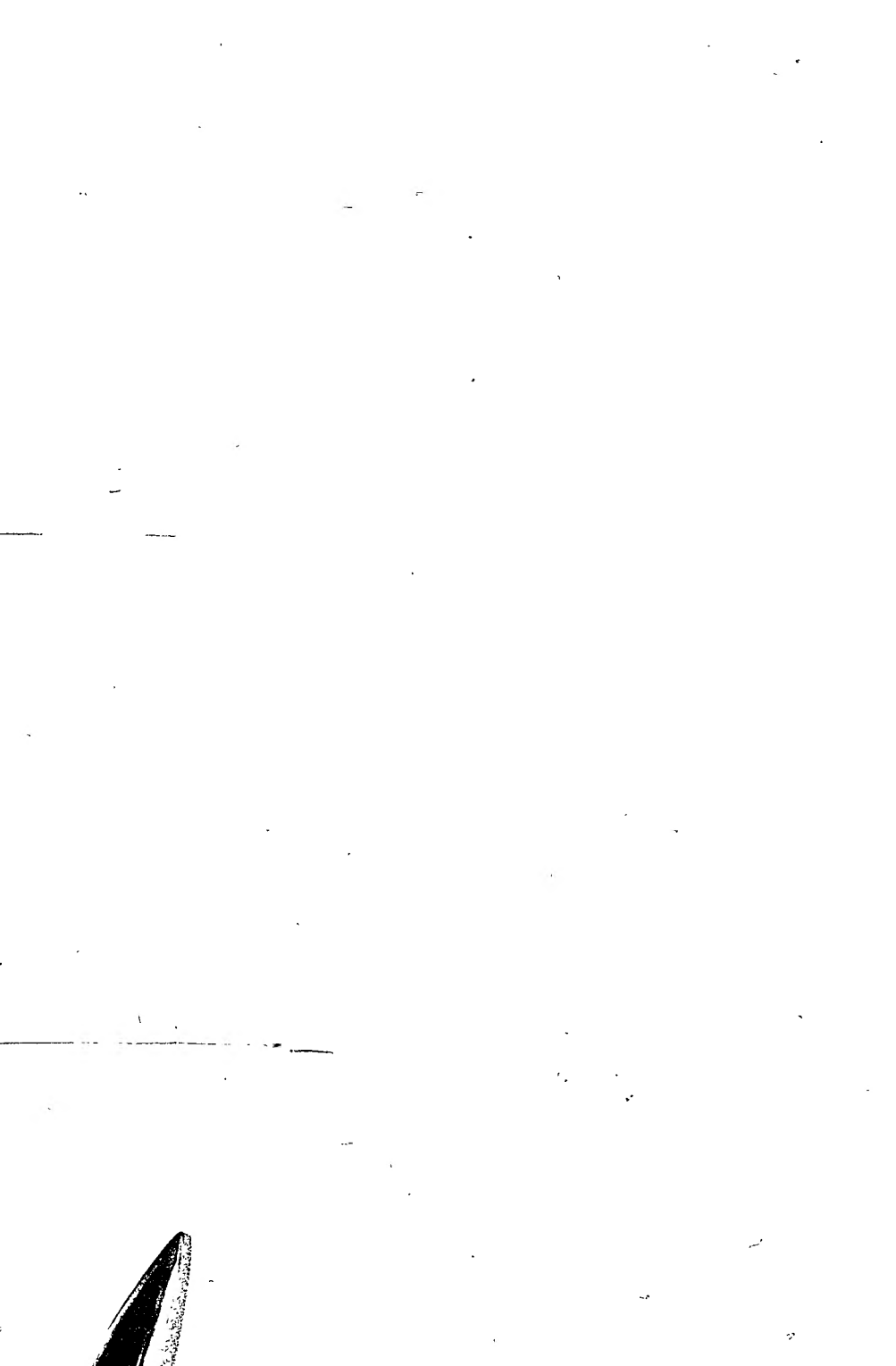




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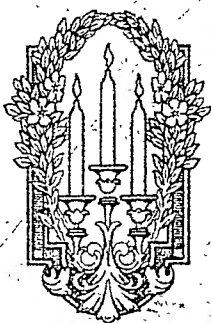






The  
Language Question  
in  
Saskatchewan

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# *The Language Question*

in

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As Parliament is about to re-open, we notice that some of our fellow-citizens blinded by ignorance and fanaticism, strive to convince the members of our legislature that the teaching of English alone should be permitted in our schools.

To attain their end, they avail themselves of the power of the press. They realize the all-powerful influence of the newspaper which is due to the gullible credulity of its readers. They are conscious of the fact that but few people are persuaded that a newspaper article is often the opinion of but one man, perhaps a man of no great ability; that this man may write only in the interest of a clique, that he is perhaps unacquainted with the truth, or if acquainted with it, that he is either unwilling to speak it, or unable to do so. With the instrumentality of the press, they hope to deceive a large number of their readers and to frighten members of the legislature.

To attain their end, they want to persuade everybody that outside of the Province of Quebec, only one language, English, should be spoken, because, forsooth! we live in an English colony.

Nevertheless, they could, and should investigate how Canada happens to be an English Colony. On January 22th 1890 during a session of Parliament at Ottawa Mr. Davin thus explained this historical fact: "Canada, said he, is an English colony, thanks to that French race which seems to act on the mind of my honorable friend (Dalton McCarthy) as a red rag in the sight of a bull; for everybody knows full well that only a short time after this race had come under the British Flag, they had to withstand very powerful allurements from the Thirteen Colonies which opened to them their arms and hands. Had they not been sincerely true to the new authority, had



they not in their loyalty resisted the seductions of Franklin and others, Canada would not be an English Colony to day. If my honorable friend knows not how to be thankful, he should at least try to be just."

Moreover, these fellow-citizens of ours should understand that Canada, like England, is not now, and shall never be a country of one language.

They should remember that in 1911, an Imperial Conference was held in London to discuss matters relating to public education. In this meeting of men who had come from all parts of the British Empire, the delegates of Scotland mentioned the Gaelic language taught in their schools.

One delegate from Wales explained that his country, in spite of the closest political union with Great Britain for six hundred and fifty years, was still bilingual. He stated that even now there are in Wales more than a million people who speak Welsh.

The delegate from Ireland was proud to report that in five thousand elementary schools in his country, the Irish children commence their studies by first learning their own mother tongue.

The delegate from Malta spoke of the three languages officially recognized in his country.

— Dr. Viljoen, a delegate of the Orange Free State, spoke of a system of bilingual schools which has been liberally and extensively established in the South African Republic, under the New Constitution.

It is a noted fact that England has never compelled the people of India to use the English language for the past hundred years, but that they still use their numberless dialects. Neither did she impose any such rule on Egypt, nor on any English Colony.

Here we might pointedly ask ourselves this question: "Would the Boers fight now for England, if England had compelled them to use only the English language in their schools! These same Boers, only a few years ago, waged a disastrous war against our mother country. They were defeated, it is true, but England treated them with justice. She gave them "a square deal". She allowed them to use their own language, to teach it to their children and to enjoy a right



of which we, French Canadians, are threatened to be deprived. Yet this beautiful province was discovered by us; it owes us both its civilization and Christianity; and this is done at the very hour in which France is crowning itself with glory in Europe, at the very hour when she is suffering more than the other allied nations, and for the welfare of these nations.

May we not likewise ask ourselves how long the British Flag would have waved over India and the sea Islands under a regime of an arbitrary rule?

Liberty and justice: such has ever been the unchanging motto of the British Empire; and any section of the British Empire which does not conform with it, may and ought to be held up as disloyal to the spirit of the British Empire. Wherever after a conquest or a treaty, England has hoisted her flag, she has been at all times careful to respect the principles of International law, she has always refrained from tampering with the laws, the language and the religion of her new subjects.

The Viscount de Vogüé was right when in 1889, he gave expression to this quaint but deep reflection: "When in the Valley of Josaphat, the question shall be asked, which of all men were the best rulers, I believe the dead of Old England shall rise first."

We can safely affirm that all our fellow-citizens endowed with a broad mind and a noble heart, understand and approve of our legitimate desire to preserve our beautiful language; and that all give their unqualified approval to the words which Sir Oliver Mowat said in 1889: "The French Canadians love their language; they want their children to learn it; but at the same time they know that their interests require them to be well acquainted also with English. If you prevent them from teaching French to their children, they will hate you and shun your schools. If you allow them to teach French to their children, they will be glad to have them learn English also. Such is the policy of my Government; such is the policy of *any intelligent man*."

And the same Honourable Minister added: "Such was the policy of Doctor Ryerson and of all the members of the Board of Public Education. I want to read you a letter written by this doctor: "In answer to your letter dated April 16, I have the honor to say that as



the French language, as well as the English, is recognized as one of the languages of our country, it is both expedient and legitimate for trustees to allow both these languages to be taught to school children, if parents request it."

For the sake of peace and concord in our beloved Canada, for the welfare of all its inhabitants, would it not be highly desirable to see all its provinces under the leadership of men as broad minded and as large hearted as the Honourable Mowat?

In such a responsible position, they would teach all those under their instruction and guidance that it is impossible to prevent French Canadians from using their own language; and that the greater the effort to prevent them from learning and speaking it, the more they will resist violence and the more they will love the language of their forefathers.

In such a responsible position, they would strenuously remind the majority that might is not right; and to those who are ever ready to oppress the weak, they would repeat the words of the Honourable Edward Blake: "A full measure and overflowing measure is what the strong should give to the weak."

In such a responsible position, they would realize that because we desire the welfare of children, we earnestly strain to have them receive an education that will prepare them for the struggle for life. Hence we consider it a sacred duty to have them learn the French language, and a strict necessity to give them a working knowledge of the English language.

Finally in such a responsible position, they would ask their fellow citizens to be reasonable enough to understand that there is no harm in speaking the language of Racine and Corneille, of Bossuet and Molière, of Lamartine and Chateaubriand, the language of arts and belles-lettres, the language of diplomacy and nobility in all European nations.

## II

A renowned statesman, speaking to his son who wished to take up the career of his father, said to him one day: "My son, if you wish to succeed, remember it is not enough to look into your books, you must often look out the windows."



It would seem that some of our people do not look often enough out the windows; they do not sufficiently consider the trend of events beyond our boundaries, and cannot therefore profit by the lessons and examples of other nations.

They want, for instance, to suppress in the schools of our province the teaching of all foreign language. Why should they not learn what has recently happened in England?

Two years ago, the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, appointed a Commission, the Leathes Commission, to examine very carefully the education given to children in the schools of England. He selected as members of this Commission the most competent educators. They at once set to work, they corresponded with the presidents and professors of the greatest universities; they spoke to teachers of (primary and secondary) Grammar and High Schools; they themselves visited a large number of schools; they took into consideration the remarks contributed by many persons thoroughly learned and well grounded in educational matters; they went through the chief European Institutions to find out what is being done there for the education of youth.

Only a few months ago, after working very earnestly, they wrote a most interesting report which all our law makers should carefully study before they give a decision concerning the important problem which they are about to solve.

And what do they say in that report? They deplore a great negligence manifested by the English people in the study of living languages: a negligence which is far from honoring our nation, and which causes very serious injury.

"This carelessness, says the report, is a symptom of the intellectual apathy of our people, or rather of their excessive attachment to other occupations, sports and similar diversions."

In England therefore, parents do not care very much to have their children educated; but they want them to be good players of foot ball and other such games. "A very large number of our fellow-citizens, says the report, look on instruction rather with a spirit of toleration than true appreciation. And yet, the study of living language is an exercise which develops the highest faculties, imagination, aesthetic, feeling, and intelligence.



This neglect of the study of foreign languages has been in the past highly injurious to English trade; and several important firms confessed to the members of the Commission that they often had to engage the services of German clerks because they spoke foreign languages.

This neglect is likely to become even more harmful to English trade in coming years, for, according to the Report: "The interests of Trade after the war, will require not only a deeper and more extensive study of foreign languages, but other studies as well, of which this knowledge of languages is the key: such as a deep insight into the character, ways of thinking, conditions and economical capabilities of foreign nations."

Hitherto the English had but one ambition: to be business-men, tradesmen; life for them seemed to mean only "business." But to day, if they wish to succeed even in business, they must needs devote themselves more earnestly to intellectual culture and the study of languages.

And what is the principal European language that they must master? The report of the Committee does not hesitate, but boldly declares that it is the French language. It seems expedient here to quote both what the Commissioners say of that language which is so dear to us, and the reasons which lead them to give it their preference.

"The importance of a language, they say, may be judged by the role played by the nation speaking that language in the spreading of modern civilization, by the intrinsic worth of its literature, by its contribution to the serious knowledge of our age, and by its practical utility in both commercial and international relations.

"The French language is incontestably the most important in the history of modern civilization... France has been for centuries the acknowledged leader of European nations in arts and sciences... As for practical purposes, a large majority of witnesses have accorded to the French language the most prominent place... French is not only the language of diplomacy, but the medium commonly used as a vehicle of communication between persons of different nationalities."

Besides this, geographical proximity gives to the French language a special value for the English people; and the present hard-



ships suffered by both will create an everlasting bond of sympathy between the two nations. In all aspects, French is for us especially the most important of foreign living languages. It now holds, it must preserve the foremost place in all our schools and universities."

If all our newspapers were to print in large type this well-merited appreciation of the French language, how much good they would thus accomplish! How efficiently they would enlighten our fellow-citizens, impart to them true knowledge, inspire them with more charitable feelings, suggest to them a policy more reasonable, more favorable to the real progress of our country!

One of the reasons given by the commissioners why the English people should learn first the French is that their country is near to France. Now in these provinces the English Canadian is a citizen of a Colony of which French Canadians are also citizens and of which they became citizens before he did.

He should therefore realize that French Canadians possess here a more ancient history and older traditions; that their language must not and cannot be considered a foreign language; he should bear in mind that they were pioneers in these immense territories which now constitute Canada; that the banks of our broad rivers and the shores of our majestic lakes perpetuate the souvenir of their heroes and missionaries: that the history of Canada is indebted to their forefathers for all its interest and glory; he should easily acquire the conviction that they rightly consider themselves authorized to learn and speak the French language, that language which the whole world considers a masterpiece, perfected for centuries, unequalled in beauty, and fit to express the most sublime thoughts of the mind and the noblest feelings of the heart.

### III

The French Canadian is at home in Canada; as long as he lives in the Province of Quebec, he may rightly use his own language; but when he settles in another province, let him be satisfied with speaking the English language!

Such is the common assertion, and in order to strengthen its supposed cogency, it is gratuitously claimed that the teaching of French in the schools handicaps the teaching of English.



What does the Leathes Commission say about this subject!

In the first place the Commissioners found out that the study of the English language and literature is by far deeper in Scotland than in England, because in the former country, the children study and master two languages. Now if the study of Gaelic helps in mastering English, why could not the study of French in our schools obtain a like result?

The Commissioners likewise emphatically assert that in Wales, the sound method has been in use to teach the children first their native tongue so that they may easily master the English language. And in doing this the people only follows the advice given them in 1904 by the Committee of Public Education.

Said the members of this Committee: "Our opinion is that in the primary schools of the Country, it is of the greatest pedagogical importance that the mother tongue of the child should be used, and that it be the first taught to the pupil. *All experts in pedagogy* without any exception agree on this point, namely that all children should be taught exclusively in their mother tongue... It is absolutely evident that the first step in the education of the child must be to teach him to use intelligently his own language."

And the man who fought so many years to introduce into Wales this rational system of education is no other than the present Prime Minister of England. The fact he learned and spoke Welsh did not prevent him from speaking English, nor from being loyal to his country, since he has become its leader.

One day in a public speech, he hailed the Welsh language as the medium through which the Celts have for centuries expressed their prayers, joys and sorrows, their enthusiasm, their souvenirs, and aspirations, all that they think of the present world and all that they hope for in the next. He admitted the value of English for commercial purposes, for its general usefulness; nevertheless he could not see why the Welsh should give up their own language. His earnest prayer was that the Welsh would preserve their language, which is not a language of Trade, or of the outside world, but a language of the heart: "This language, said he, contains an inspiration and an assistance; it is a balm and a comfort."



These noble and just sentiments were those of our gracious Queen Victoria, who on March 3, 1849, wrote to Marquis of Lansdowne, Minister of Education, the following words quite consonant with her fine mind and excellent heart: "The Queen profits by the present occasion to express once more the hope that in future, the Gaelic language as well as the English, shall be taught in all the schools of Scotland, for it would really be a serious mistake to try to prevent a nation from reading and writing a language which is used by the mass of the people. The Queen in her loyalty and affection for the Scottish people, is deeply interested in whatever will best contribute to preserve their mentality, and the simplicity of their manner. Moreover the Queen orders that hereafter the Welsh as well as the English language shall be taught to the children of Wales."

Only a few weeks hence, at a meeting held in the House of Lords in London, the members of two Committees representing England and France, unanimously passed the following resolution: "Convinced that the Alliance of the English and French people should become still more intimate through the perfect mastery of the languages and literatures of both nations, we, the members of this Committee, express the desire that the teaching of English and French be encouraged in all the schools of both countries, and we beg the educational authorities of England and France to give this important suggestion their serious consideration."

How many of our Canadian papers mentioned in their columns which they gave their unstinted approval? And yet this way of this resolution which all the newspapers of England printed, and to thinking of the most influential men of England and France, is assuredly weighty enough to attract the attention of those among us who believe they make a great profession of patriotism when they try to suppress in this country that which is considered right, reasonable, and profitable beyond the sea.

And these convictions were likewise the convictions of some of our political men formerly living in Ontario. What a pleasure to quote here these beautiful words of Sir Oliver Mowat, when he condemned as inopportune a bill presented by Mr. Craig against the teaching of French in our schools!

Said the eminent statesman: "The bill of Mr. Craig must be rejected: it is a menace against general order and a real injustice against



French Canadians. The French Canadians have ever been as loyal citizens as the English; they protected Canada, and they even saved it. If we desire to become a great nation, let us not thus destroy the work of time and reason. It was union obtained by generous compromise that gave to England the empire of the seas; to Switzerland the power to defend her alpine retreat against all invaders, and to Germany that of facing so many external enemies."

And Hon. M. Ross, on the same occasion, justly remarked: "I cannot understand why we should declare such a war against the French language. These people of French origin who are criticized so severely because they want to preserve their own language, these people, I say, were here on this Continent many years before we Anglo-Saxons set our foot upon it. Owing to their enterprising spirit, they took possession of it; they conquered it through their courage and perseverance. Long before we ever saw our lakes and rivers, the French Canadians had explored them; two hundred and fifty years before the Anglo-Saxons landed here, the French Canadians had already established schools in Canada."

Such is the verdict of all those who have studied history, of all those whose mind is keen enough to understand its lessons, and whose heart is sensitive enough to admire its beauties.

Such, we trust, will be the verdict of our law-makers when they have to pass judgment on the law concerning the teaching of languages in our schools.

They will bear in mind that it is highly honorable and useful to speak two of the finest modern languages, the languages used by the two foremost nations of Europe; that it is even highly advantageous to do so for the intellectual development, for the greater the effort, the greater also the reward.

They should not manifest their displeasure when we say that we are proud of our language; and when we delight in relating the glorious traditions of our race; for they should know that these feelings do not weaken in our breast the fervent admiration we entertain for our government institutions; neither do they prevent us from loving this country of ours so richly endorsed with all the gifts of nature, "beautiful in all perfection" according to our illustrious



Champlain. In that beautiful country. why could not the different nationalities that inhabit it, live together in peace and harmony? Is it not broad enough to contain them all? Is it not fruitful enough to nourish them all?

To procure this peace and harmony, broadmindedness is necessary, toleration, and moderation.

#### IV

Bilingualism may indeed have some disadvantages; but on the other hand, who should say that French is not a beautiful language, if not actually the most beautiful of all? Why then should we not wish not only that it should be preserved among French Canadians for the glory of our country, but that it should be learned and spoken more extensively than is usually the case among English Canadians?

In 1838 Lord Durham said: "There are in Quebec ten times more French who learn the English, than there are English who learn the French language." The present state of things is unfortunately as bad as it was then, if not actually worse, and this is surely harmful to the interests of those of our fellow citizens who are of a different origin.

Such was precisely the remark which a few days ago, M. Harold Fisher, mayor of Ottawa, made to the newspapers of the Federal Capital City. He told them of his earnest wish to see the French language taught in all the schools and high-schools of Ontario: "I am myself", he said "a victim of the defective system which has been used hitherto. In our educational institutions, French is taught, here, but written French, especially Grammar; and nothing remains of it; we can neither understand nor pronounce a spoken word. What is needed is to study it through conversation. French thus mastered will be more useful to Canadians than Spanish which has been placed on the programme of Ontario. The new minister (M. Coderre) will have his hands full if he wishes to cure us of our ailment of being the poorest linguists in the world except possibly some of the States of the Republic south of us."

For the same reason, the "Daily Echo" of Halifax, N. S. a few weeks ago said: "There should be in Canada two languages obligatory for all children in the public schools: English and French. Both are great language of civilization such as we approve of. Every child



brought up in the use of these two languages, has a marked superiority over those who have not been so fortunate; and the nation which can speak equally well these two greater languages of the world, has an evident advantage on all other nations, both in commercial matters and in intellectual accomplishment. Any other language may be elective, but these two should be obligatory."

M. Alfred Baker a former President of the Royal Society of Canada, and of the Toronto University, one day said: "The knowledge of these two languages supposes, and as a matter of fact causes intellectual suppleness which is so advantageous as an educational asset. With us the use of both languages is almost restricted to the French Canadians. Why should not the other Canadians cultivate this intellectual accomplishment? France seems at this time to reach the most brilliant period of her wonderful history, and of her most magnificent triumphs in sciences, arts and literature. The relations existing between France and the British will be more friendly, more intimate than ever. The interchange of ideas between the two nations will be more constant. Trade and reciprocal traveling will be more frequent. Therefore the study of French should be developed in our English schools. All our libraries should have some shelves filled with the French classics and the best works of French literature.

There should be French newspapers in our reading rooms. I dare say that no matter how we consider the subject, whatever the point of view, literary, scientific, linguistic, national, personal, altruistic, imperial, provincial, maternal, spiritual, intellectual, the culture of the French language and French literature will be beneficial to Canada."

Let us hope that these eminently just remarks of our distinguished English speaking fellow citizens will spread more and more everywhere and that these most reasonable desires will be realized for the welfare of our beloved country.



